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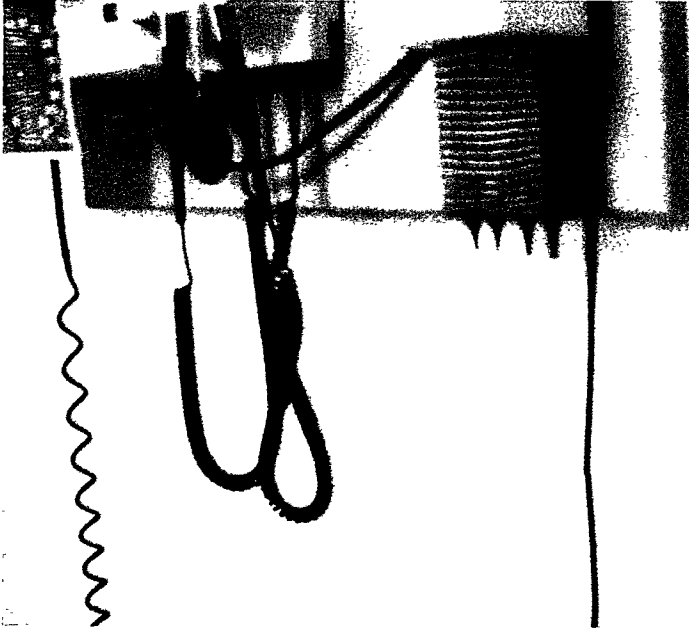
How much is a doctor's visit? It could be a lot more than you think.



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This increasingly common hidden fee is a nasty surprise on medical bills

How much does a doctor's visit really cost? It could be a lot more than you think.



When Jackie Thennes decided to switch doctors earlier this year, the hospital system in her Chicago, Ill. suburb seemed like the natural choice. She'd been to the immediate care facility multiple times before for screenings, and the doctor was in-network.

But Thennes, who is 50 and looking for work, got a nasty surprise when the bill arrived in the mail: along with an anticipated charge for the doctor's visit, she was also charged a "facility fee." At \$235, the fee was slightly more than the doctor's visit itself.

Thennes tried to contest the charge with the hospital system, but to no avail. And while she said she won't go to the facility again, she worries about getting hit with the same fee somewhere else.

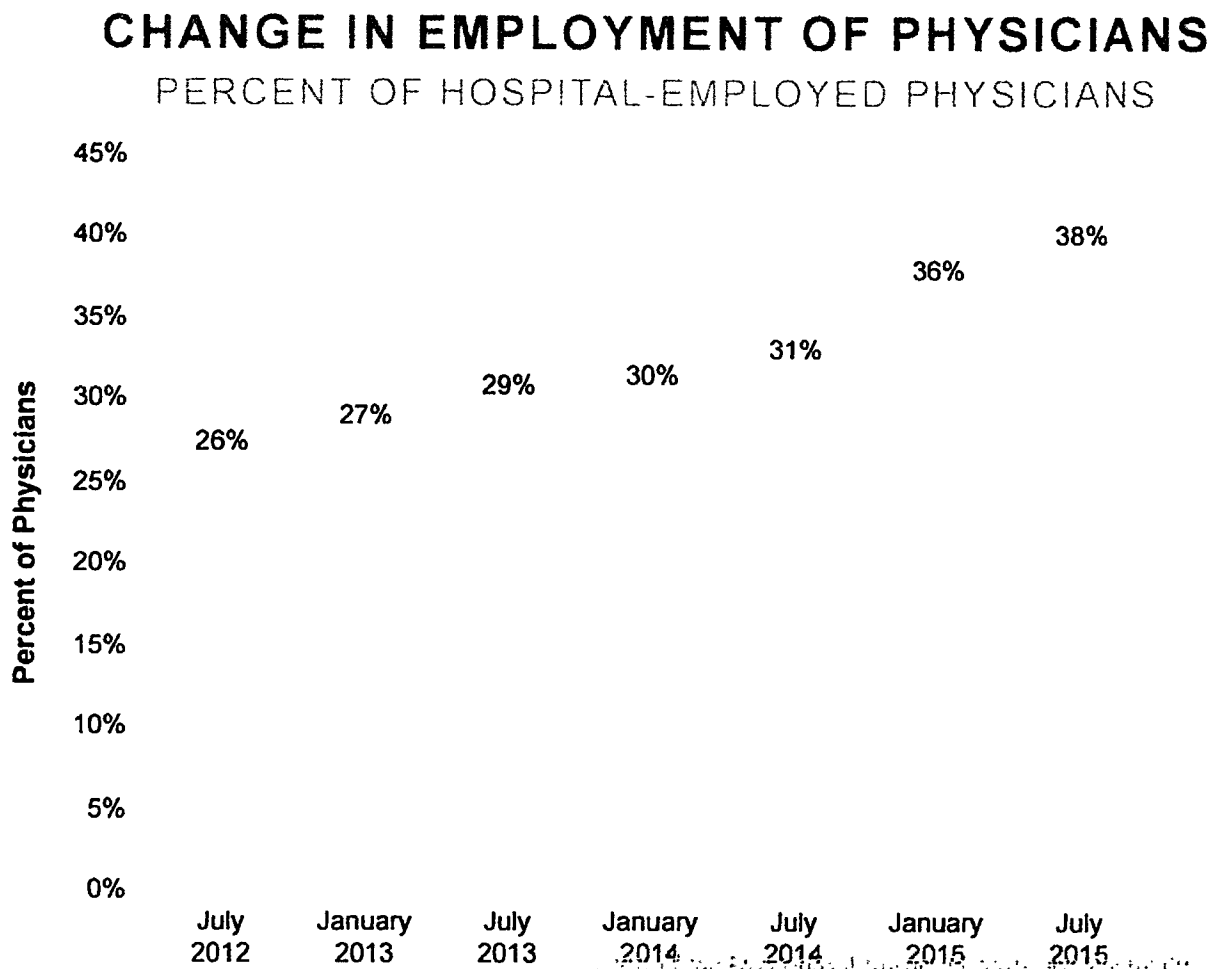
This is "going to deter me from getting the medical attention I need," she said. "I'm going to get sick just worrying about it."

These kinds of facility fees are common at hospitals, where they help pay the hospital system's overhead costs. But as doctors' offices increasingly are being bought up by big hospital systems, patients are being charged facility fees of up to hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket without warning and without the ability to contest them.

Read: [This expensive risk lurks in nearly every medical experience you have](#)

Hospitals, in return, say these charges are key to their business model, since they must be available for "24/7 access to care for all types of patients, to serve as a safety net provider for

How much more? A 2017 study found that 38% of hospital-employed physicians charge a facility fee for a 15-minute visit.

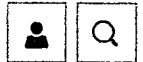


Many patients don't know about the possibility of a facility fee until they are charged one.

Liz Salmi, a 37-year-old who works in health care communications, did more work than most before moving to a new health plan.

Knowing that her brain cancer diagnosis, which she received at age 29, could expose her and her husband to large out-of-pocket expenses, she industriously researched what procedures she'd gone through before would cost.

All her research, though, did not prepare Salmi for a \$90 facility fee after a routine primary care doctor's visit.

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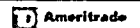
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